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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION - FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION -
TOKYO

LEAD STORIES: Most Tuesday morning papers front-paged Prime Minister Abe's monetary offering to Yasukuni Shrine on the occasion of its annual spring festival in April. Claiming that the premier took that action in lieu of a visit, the dailies speculated that Beijing might strongly react and that it might affect PM Abe's proposed trip to China in the fall.

¶1. "Sarkozy's Diplomatic Ability Unknown" The liberal Asahi editorialized (5/8): "...French President-elect Sarkozy's diplomatic ability is still unknown. While maintaining its alliance with the US, France has made strict demands on the US from time to time, thus showing its independent position. Nonetheless, Sarkozy has called for improving France's relations with the US, while at the same time criticizing outgoing President Chirac, who opposed the war in Iraq. We would like to keep a close watch on what sort of relations Sarkozy will establish with the Bush administration, which is facing tough going in Iraq, and how he will modify France's pro-Arab line of the Chirac era."

¶2. "Will Sarkozy Show Leadership in Improving Ties With US?" An editorial in the top-circulation, moderate Yomiuri commented (5/8): "...France has many diplomatic issues to tackle. One urgent task is getting the treaty to establish an EU constitution back on track after it was derailed by the failure of France and the Netherlands to ratify it. It is worth watching how Sarkozy will demonstrate leadership resolving the issue and regain France's key role in the EU. It will also be important for the pro-US Sarkozy to repair the nation's relations with Washington, which cooled over Iraq.... France has shown a positive stance toward lifting the EU ban on the

export of arms to China. An end to the ban would affect the security environment surrounding Japan."

DONOVAN